

The Origin of the Hindu-Sikh Tension in the Panjab

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For some time past there has been a good deal of misunderstanding about the origin of the Hindu-Sikh tension in the Panjab. It has become a fashion with some of our people to ascribe to the British or to the political policy of the British Government in India even things with which they had not the remotest connection. One such thing is the beginning of the Hindu-Sikh tension in the Panjab. The Hindu-Sikh tension, as we know, was a thing unknown during the Sikh rule up to the middle of the last century. And there were very happy relations between the two communities during the great uprising of 1857 and the following two decades. There could have been no better opportunity for the Britishers than the Mutiny days to exploit the Sikh sentiment against the Hindu Dogras and Poorbias who were mainly responsible both directly and indirectly, by secret alliances and open betrayals, for the downfall of the Sikh kingdom. Another opportunity offered itself to the British in the closing years of the eighteen sixties when a schismatic sect of the Sikhs, the Kookas, in their overflowing zeal and fanatical frenzy, pulled down a number of Hindu tombs and went about shouting: *Marhī masānī dhāi-ké kar dīo madānā*, meaning 'Pull down the mausoleums and crematories and level them with the earth.' But nobody took these activities of the Kookas very seriously and they provided no pretext for anyone to create hostilities between the Hindus and the Sikhs. It is, therefore, not correct to say that "the unfilial sentiments of Sikhs towards Hinduism were the creation of the British who, true to their policy of 'divide and rule' tried to create separatism." (Suraj Bhan, the *Tribune*, Ambala, September 25, 1957.)

Historically speaking, the tension had its origin in the unhappy language used for Guru Nanak and his followers by Shri Swami Dayananda, the founder of the Arya Samaj, in his book the *Satyarth Prakash* published in 1875, the year in which, on April 10, the first Arya Samaj was established in Bombay.

(I shall not quote extensively from the first edition of the *Satyarth Prakash* or from its later revised and enlarged editions to avoid unpleasantness.)

The word used for the Sikh Guru therein is *dhūrta*, which, according to Bate's *Dictionary of the Hindi language*, means "rogue, cheat, fraudulent, crafty, cunning, knavish, sly, dishonest, mischievous." The hymns of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture, he called *mīthyā* (falsehood), and Sikhism, a *jal* (a snare) to rob and cheat simple folk of their wealth and property (*dhan ādik harné ké wāsaté*).

Two years alter, Swami Dayananda came to the Panjab and established the Arya Samaj at Lahore. In his discourses in the Panjab, he always praised the work of the Sikh Gurus. This attracted a number of Sikhs to the Arya Samaj. One of them, Bhai Jawahir Singh, later became the Secretary of the Lahore Arya Samaj and also of the D.A.V. College Managing Committee.

While Swami Dayananda was staying at Kanpur, on his return from the Panjab, Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sub-Engineer of the Ajmer Division, wrote to him in protest against his objectionable remarks in the *Satyarth Prakash* against the Sikhs and Sikhism. Swamiji wrote back saying that his opinion had undergone a change during his visit to the Panjab and that the remarks in question would be deleted from the next edition of the book. But nothing came to be done. It was, perhaps, due to the untimely death of Swamiji on October 10, 1883. The second edition of the *Satyarth Prakash* was, perhaps, then still in the press.

With the passage of time, the publication of the second edition of the *Satyarth Prakash* and the admission of some over-zealous youngmen into the Arya Samaj, the attitude of some of the leading Arya Samajists became increasingly hostile towards Sikhs and Sikhism. The columns of the *Arya Samachar* Meerut, and the *Arya Patrika*, Lahore, of those days bear witness to this.

The second edition of the *Satyarth Prakash* turned out to be more disappointing and hostile. In it the attack on the Sikh Gurus, the Sikh scripture and the Sikh people in general was more direct, more biting and more painful. Guru Nanak was given out as illiterate, self-conceited and hypocritical. The Sikh scripture was insulted and the tenets and symbols of Sikhism were ridi-

culed. And the Sikhs in general were dubbed as arrogant and slaves to lust.

This naturally disillusioned such of the Sikhs as were members of the Arya Samaj or were its active supporters. They felt very much hurt and dejected. What added to the tension was the fanatical attitude of some members of the Arya Samaj who went out of their way to flash the wrongful remarks of the *Satyarth Prakash* and unnecessarily wounded the susceptibilities of the Sikhs.

There were, however, some well-meaning members of the Arya Samaj who sincerely felt that a wrong had come to be done to the Sikhs by the objectionable remarks of Swami Dayananda. They wrote apologetic and appeasing letters and notes in the *Vidya Prakashak* and other journals and newspapers. To quote only one, Lala Amolak Ram Munsif of Gujjar Khan writing to the Editor, *Akhbar-i-Am*, Lahore, on September 30, 1887, said :

Mere piāre aur mukarram Editor Akhbār-i-Ām, Kisī gumnām sāhib ne ap-ke Akhbār ke zarīye hāmāre muazziz aur fakhr-i-gaṛm Sikh bhāīyon ko Āryā dharm ke barkhilāf mushtaal karne ke wāste Swāmī Dayānand Surastī ke Satyārth Prakāsh se ek intkhāb shāyā kiya hai. Main sacche dil se umīd kartā hūm kih yih us kī koshish-i-hasidānā bilkul rāīgān jāegī.

Āryā Samāj Dayānand Saraswatī ko sirf insān samajhtā hai. Har ek insān se ghaltī honī mumkin hai. Swami Dayānand Saraswatījī aghlabān zabān Panjābī aur halāt-i-Panjāb se Satyārth Prakāsh likhte waqt pure wāquif nā the. Main yaqīn kartā hūn kih bashart mauqā milne ke woh is rāi ko zarūr tarmīm karte, magar afsos hai kih unko mauqā nā milā. Lekin sirf unkā yih rāi zāhir karnā Āryā Samāj ko pāband nahīn kartā. Muje umīd hai kih taqrībān har ek Āryā is rāi kī ghalī kā qāyal hai. Main khud Āryā hone kā fakhar kartā hūn aur main is rāi ko ghalat samajhtā hūn. Mujhe purā yaqīn hai kih mere Singh bhāi sirf Swāmī Dayanand Saraswatī kī ek ghaltī ke bāis us ke bāqqī nihāyat umēd kām ke hargiz mukhālīf nahīn ho jāenge.

Translated into English it would read as :

My dear and respected Editor the *Akhbār-i-Am*,

Some anonymous person has published in your paper an extract from Swami Dayananda Saraswati's *Satyarth Prakash* with the object of instigating our respected and glori-

ous Sikh brethren against the Arya dharma. I sincerely hope this jealous effort of his will not succeed.

The Arya Samaj considers Swami Dayananda Saraswati a human being. Every human being is liable to err. At the time of writing the *Satyārth Prakāsh*, Swamiji was probably not fully conversant with the Panjab and Panjabi language. . . . Alas . he did not get a chance, otherwise, I am sure, he would have amended this opinion. But his expression of this opinion does not bind the Arya Samaj. I hope almost every Arya is convinced of this error. I am proud of being an Arya myself, and I hold this opinion [of Swami Dayananda] to be wrong. I am sure that or this one mistake of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, my Sikh brethren will not at all turn against the rest of his very good work.

Copies of this letter were sent to some other newspapers as well.

The Sikhs were to some extent soothed by the expression of regret and goodwill by those who had reasons to be grateful to the Sikhs for the help and co-operation which they had extended to Swami Dayananda and his movement in the early days. But this did not continue for long. Instead of improving the situation, it was worsened by the fire-breathing speeches of some of the leaders of the Arya Samaj at its eleventh annual session held at Lahore on Saturday and Sunday the 24th and 25th of November, 1888.

Pandit Guru Datt, the leader of the anti-modernist section of the Arya Samaj, in his speech on the morning of Sunday the 25th of November, not only repeated the anti-Sikh remarks of the *Satyārth Prakāsh*, but also entered into odious comparisons and launched an attack on Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. The discussions of Lala Murlidhar and Swami Swatmananda on the subject added fuel to the smouldering fire which soon burst out into flames.

Pandit Guru Datt's speech was followed the same evening by that of Pandit Lekh Ram who spoke with still greater force and hostility against the Sikhs. Not only this. At one stage in the course of his speech, Pandit Lekh Ram physically insulted the holy book of the Sikhs, *Guru Granth Sahib*, which had been unceremoniously placed there on the table before him. This was more than what the Sikhs present in the meeting could tolerate.

Thus publicly insulted and ridiculed, the Sikhs were left with the only alternative of finally breaking with the Arya Samaj.

There was then a large number of Hindus as well who felt disgusted with this attitude of the leaders of the Arya Samaj. A joint protest meeting was held on the next Sunday, the 2nd of December 1888 in the Baoli Sahib, Lahore, under the presidency of Lala Nand Gopal. Lala Ladli Prasad was the principal speaker. The other speakers were Bhai Jawahir Singh, Bhai Dit Singh and Dr. Narayan Singh. According to the report of the meeting published in the *Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, of December 8, 1888, there was a great resentment in the city of Lahore at the ugly and unpleasant situation created by the leaders of the Arya Samaj in their eleventh annual session held in the last week of November.

This is, in brief, the factual account of how the Hindu (Arya Samaj)-Sikh tension began in the seventies and eighties of the last century, soon after the birth of the Arya Samaj.

In truth, it is a misnomer to call it Hindu-Sikh tension. It is, in fact, only Arya Samaj-Sikh tension. The new name has come to be given to it very recently. A reference to the columns of the *Arya Gazette* and the *Sat-dharm Pracharak* will show that the Arya Samajists for a long time carried on a campaign against the word *Hindu* and refused to associate themselves with it. But this is a separate topic of study.

For a more detailed study, the inquisitive reader is referred to :

The *Satyarth Prakash*, Hindi, first edition of 1875 and subsequent revised and enlarged editions and their translations into Urdu, English and Panjabi.

The *Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore, November and December, 1888.

The *Akhbar-i-Am*, Lahore, the *Aftab-i-Panjab*, Lahore, the *Koh-i-Noor*, Lahore, for September to December, 1888.

These and other newspapers and journals published at Lahore during the last two decades of the nineteenth century contain very valuable material on this subject.